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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Citation and marginalisation: The ethics of feminism in medieval studies

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This article draws on my experience both as a medievalist and as a feminist working in a UK university today to discuss the challenges facing feminist academia more widely. Using Medieval Studies as a case study, this paper will argue that in times of austerity the pressure on young feminist academics to conform is greater as it is increasingly important to get one's work published in order to stay competitive. This pressure to publish limits intellectual curiosity and forces research down more conventional paths. This paper will lay out how this functions in Medieval Studies and attempt to suggest some ways in which it could be overcome. One strategy of resistance I suggest entails what I will call an 'ethics of source study'; a way of looking at and responding to both medieval and modern texts with an awareness of their potential effect on the world.

I will begin by discussing the pressing need to publish work forced upon us by the Research Excellence Framework, and how this drive towards publication can make our work less radical. I will then illustrate this with examples from my own discipline. In Medieval Studies, the publication of more articles means that the production of editions is neglected and this forces scholars to use out-of-date and misogynist editions. Finally, I will suggest some ideas of how we can create alternative networks in which feminist academia can survive and flourish, including an outline of what an ethics of source study might look like.

Keywords: feminism, ethics, medieval, Research Excellence Framework, Anglo-Saxon

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Introduction

Austerity in the academy falls first upon marginalised disciplines, as the theme of this special issue recognises. As a feminist and a medievalist, this is hard for me to ignore. Using Medieval Studies as a case study, I argue that in times of austerity the pressure on early career researchers to conform to pre-existing academic norms can lead to less radical work. It is increasingly important to get one's work published in order to stay competitive, but the pressure to publish creates a quantity over quality dynamic which can limit intellectual curiosity and force early career researchers to anticipate what others may want from our work. In Medieval Studies, the publication of more articles often means that the production of editions of medieval texts is neglected and this forces scholars to use out-of-date and largely misogynist editions of texts. One strategy of resistance to such pressures is, I suggest, an 'ethics of source study': a way of looking at and responding to both medieval and modern texts with an awareness of their potential effect on the world.

The *Medieval Feminist Forum*, a journal of scholarship on women and gender in Medieval Studies, was founded in response to the marginal status of feminist medievalists. One of the founding members of the journal, Elizabeth Robertson, states that she often feels 'doubly marginalized' as a feminist medievalist, 'perceived to be some sort of antiquarian hysteric' (1992, p. 22). She writes explicitly about the historic marginalisation of the medieval within the academy, citing cutbacks to courses in Medieval Studies across Europe, and the struggle for Medieval Studies to 'retain its place at the Modern Languages Association' (1992, p. 23). Although Robertson's article is now over twenty years old, the precarious position of Medieval Studies is still evident. For instance, I received an email this year to the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists (ISAS) mailing list (Foys, 9th April 2013) stating that 'the

MLA is exploring collapsing pre-Modern literary divisions (Old English, Middle English, Chaucer) into a single division.’ Although this MLA proposal did not go ahead, the suggestion that all literary study from 500 to 1500 could be treated as one category provides evidence of the marginalisation of the medieval caused by an unsophisticated understanding of the ‘pre-Modern’ (and therefore primitive?) past.

Not only is the medieval period marginalised within the academy, but early feminist work in Medieval Studies is often ignored in larger histories of feminist scholarship. A little-known example of early feminist Medieval Studies is the research of women in the nineteenth century who turned to medieval history to express their thoughts about their desire for equal pay for equal work (Bennett, 2006). In Judith Bennett’s *History Matters*, she notes the lack of medieval women’s history in dominant women’s history journals. She notes that between 2000 and 2004, ‘the three major English-language journals in women’s history—*Gender and History*, the *Journal of Women’s History*, and the *Women’s History Review*—have published 295 articles of which 7—yes, 7—deal with women’s history before 1500’ (Bennett, 2006, p. 32).

What is more, we have not reached a stage at which feminist critique is accepted as fundamental to any understanding of the Middle Ages. Lees and Overing (2010) have explored this marginalisation in Old English studies. They note that the major journal in the field, *Anglo-Saxon England*, has yet to publish a feminist or gender-identified article; the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists conference has no place for theoretically oriented study; and the *Year’s Work in Old English Studies* critical annual bibliography does not include a single section dedicated to gender or queer theory. In her article in *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature*, Diane Watt (2013, p. 358) points out that even later medieval women

writers 'continue to fit uncomfortably within the dominant masculine paradigms of traditional literary history, as is so vividly illustrated by the scant attention paid to women in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, edited by David Wallace (1999) and, more recently, Christopher Cannon's *The Grounds of English Literature* (2004)'.

Even within scholarship on the Middle Ages that explicitly recognises the importance of women and women's writing, early medieval feminist work is often excluded. As Mary Dockray Miller's 'Old English Literature and Feminist Theory: A State of the Field' (2008, p. 1049) points out, Judith Bennett's *History Matters* 'seems to be composed entirely of the High and Late Middle Ages; she does not discuss any Anglo-Saxon sources that could provide even more historical depth to her own inquiries.' As Bennett's work is focussed on extending the historical reach of feminist scholarship, this lack of Anglo-Saxon texts is problematic. The paucity of Anglo-Saxon material in medieval feminist scholarship has also been addressed recently by Diane Watt and Liz Herbert McAvoy in *The History of British Women's Writing: Volume 1, 700-1500* (2012, p. 5). While praising works such as *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing* (2003), they call attention to the fact that 'its primary focus is again on the later period, with relatively little examination undertaken of what we term here the female-focused "pre-texts" of the Anglo-Saxon period'. In a later article, Watt (2013) returns to the dearth of Anglo-Saxon material, explaining that *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English* (2007) still includes no texts prior to 1170 (Marie de France), and 'histories of medieval women's writing that do include the early medieval period, such as Laurie A Finke's *Women's Writing in English: Medieval England* (1999), or *The History of British Women's Writing 700-1500* [...] are the exception rather than the rule'. As far

back as 2001 in *Double Agents*, Lees and Overing had pointed out that ‘most anthologies of women’s writing and accounts of women’s history tend to exclude the Anglo-Saxon period’ (p. 6). I argue, then, that feminist Medieval Studies, with its long history of feminist analysis and its precarious position in the academy, demonstrates trends that impact the research careers and positioning of early career researchers which, in the current age of austerity, are exacerbated by further points of marginalisation.

This article draws on my experience as a medievalist and feminist early career researcher working in a UK higher university to discuss the challenges facing feminism in academia more widely. I will begin by considering the publishing pressures produced by the effects of HEFCE’s Research Excellence Framework (REF), a UK government exercise to assess the quality of research produced within higher education institutions and distribute research funding accordingly, and consider how the effects of this drive towards publication can make research less radical. I will then illustrate this point with examples from my own discipline, from both the early and late Middle Ages, showing how the need to appear well-read coupled with a lack of good-quality editions forces scholars to cite works with which they may profoundly disagree. Finally, I will posit some ideas and strategies towards the creation of alternative networks across academic disciplines in which feminist scholarship can survive and flourish, including an outline of what an ethics of source study might look like.

The Research Excellence Framework

The REF is the way in which the government of the United Kingdom assesses the quality of research produced by academic institutions. The REF submission made by each university is evaluated according to three generic criteria: outputs (65%), impact (20%) and environment (15%); that is, the research produced by the university, the varied impacts the research has had, and the quality of the research environment of the university (REF 2011, p. 6). The aims of the REF are summarised as follows (2011, p. 4):

- a. The four higher education funding bodies intend to use the assessment outcomes to inform the selective allocation of their grant for research to the institutions which they fund, with effect from 2015-16.
- b. The assessment provides accountability for public investment in research and produces evidence of the benefits of this investment.
- c. The assessment outcomes provide benchmarking information and establish reputational yardsticks, for use within the higher education (HE) sector and for public information.

So, the REF is used not only to ascertain how much funding a university should get, but also to establish whether or not the university provides value for money to the public.

The majority of the REF's decision on funding (65%) is based on the 'outputs' of the university; that is, the research produced by its staff. The assessment framework and guidance on submissions (2011) states that each staff member may

submit four different research ‘outputs’, which can include books, journal articles and conference contributions, physical artefacts, exhibitions and performances, other documents, digital artefacts and ‘other’. However, the REF is pro-rated for early career academics, meaning that we do not need to provide as many publications as established academics. The research outputs will be assessed via peer review and, in some disciplines with the added use of metrification, and rated from Unclassified (‘falls below the standard of nationally recognised work’) to Four Star (‘world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour’). As UK universities are, therefore, competing for a proportion of the available funds, there is heavy pressure on all eligible academics to produce four three or four star ‘outputs’ for their respective Unit of Assessment, the disciplinary REF panel into which submissions are made. The importance of producing sufficient material to satisfy academic expectations for the REF makes the production of research *the* most important aspect of an academic’s career. To compound the pressure, the REF’s judgement of a university’s research is not subject to an appeal process and cannot be changed (2011, p. 7).

It could be argued that the REF ensures that the best universities receive the most funding; it is a fair system that recognises and rewards research excellence. However, as the government has already initiated a spending review that will cut the higher education budget from £7.1bn in 2010 to £4.2bn by 2014 (HM Treasury, 2010; Morgan, 2010; Richardson, 2010), it seems probable that the outcomes of the REF 2014 will be used to justify the further removal of funds from academic sectors rather than to reward the ‘best’ departments with more money. Unfortunately, at the moment, government higher education funding is a zero-sum game: if one department gets more, then another will get less. What is more, evidence suggests that there is

little confidence in the academic sector about the REF's ability to assess the quality of research adequately; over sixty percent of academics surveyed by the University and College Union (UCU) said the REF had had 'a detrimental impact on the HE sector', and more than half 'did not view the REF as a good indicator of the quality of academic research' (UCU 2013, p. 3). There are also concerns that the peer review procedures used for inclusion in the REF are 'far less rigorous than those normally used in academia' (Jump, 2013f). Clearly, the majority of academics do not have confidence in the REF's ability to identify the best research being produced in their field.

The REF is a daunting prospect for many academics, but particularly for early career researchers. My university, for instance, has not provided any training for early career researchers on how to engage with or manage the process, and the bureaucratic language of the documentation surrounding it is difficult to understand and interpret. In a context in which there is already significant pressure to publish in order to gain employment within HEIs, muttered references to the REF by older colleagues add to a general climate of despondency. Fears about the effects of the REF lead many early career academics to second-guess what the Unit of Assessment panels might want, rather than following their own research interests. The effect that a poor performance for the REF might have on career ambitions pushes early career researchers to produce 'safer' work, perhaps making strategic choices about the research that they do undertake, rather than pursuing riskier research interests.

As university leaders are understandably anxious about the prospect of receiving (even) less funding, an effect of the REF is that recruitment strategies are driven by the need to hire people with a full research publication portfolio who can be submitted under the REF guidelines. Therefore, the importance of producing research

publications for academics, but especially early career academics looking to get teaching jobs before the end of a REF cycle, cannot be overstated. Even with the pro-rated reduction in ‘outputs’ for early career researchers, this need to publish places significant pressure on individuals at the early stages of their careers as the pressure on university departments to perform well in the REF inclines them towards hiring staff that can readily provide four REF ‘outputs’ rather than one or two. Reflecting this, UCU’s survey of academics shows the extent of their concern about the impact of the REF on their careers. Over a fifth of respondents thought it likely that they would be transferred to a teaching-focused contract if they did not perform to institutional REF expectations, and nearly a quarter were concerned that they would lose their job. 45% thought it likely that they would not be supported to undertake research in the future if they were not included in the REF submission (UCU 2013, p. 4; Gibney 2013b).

Consequently, concern about the future of academic careers seems prudent in light of examples from this REF cycle. The University of Leicester, for instance, has sent a memo stating that the position of staff eligible for the REF but not submitted will be reviewed. As reported in the Times Higher Education Supplement, staff will be able ‘to transfer to a teaching only contract’ if a vacancy exists or they may continue on a teaching and research contracts ‘subject to meeting “realistic” performance targets within a year’. If staff fail to meet performance targets the memo states that ‘the normal consequence would be dismissal’ (Jump 2013b). Swansea University has told its staff that they *must* submit four papers of at least 3* quality to the REF or they will be moved onto teaching-only contracts (Jump 2013c). Across the UK university sector, the number of academics recruited on 0.2 contracts (the minimum required for them to count towards a university’s REF submission) during

the past two years has risen by nearly two-thirds (Jump 2013d), and short-term contracts, timed to finish just after the REF submission deadline, are also common (Jump 2013a). Such examples of universities prioritising staff that will contribute to their REF score in their hiring practices are understandably worrying, and it is not coincidental then that academics seek to produce work that will meet the REF guidelines for research outputs. Concerns about the potential for inequality in the hiring process impact particularly on early career researchers as their research is developing in a climate of fear in which they attempt to predict what their potential employers might want to see. In particular, these anxieties push early career academics away from interdisciplinary work and towards publishing as quickly as possible.

As the structure of REF Unit of Assessments is tailored for discipline specificity, interdisciplinary research is poorly served in its current structure meaning that the pressure to have ‘outputs’ that can be submitted to the REF can lead early career academics away from riskier interdisciplinary work. Publishing strategies suggest that in order to be rated highly for research quality, the output needs to be published in a high-ranking journal. However, this tends to produce research that fits neatly into disciplinary boundaries as top ranking journals in general span a less diverse set of disciplines than lower ranking journals (Rafols et al 2012; Shaw 2013). Examples from the 2014 REF cycle also suggest that interdisciplinary work can be overlooked in the submission process. A Professor of Economics at Warwick University submitted four research papers to the REF panel, all of which were rejected by his university as ‘below the standard required in terms of quality’ despite being published in highly rated interdisciplinary journals (Shaw, 2013). Several Professors of History at Lancaster University and the University of Leicester have

also had work rejected from submission to the REF because of its interdisciplinary nature. (Shaw 2013; Leech 2013; Gibney 2013a). Issues such as these with the REF lead to some academics arguing that it acts ‘as a curb on intellectual risk-taking and innovation’ (Thomas 2011), and even that it is a ‘noose around the neck of academic freedom’ (Maini 2013). The climate of uncertainty about the value the REF places on interdisciplinary work, and its ability to assess non-traditional research fairly can lead early career researchers to ‘play it safe’ and attempt to publish discipline-specific pieces in solid, top-ranking journals.

Finally, fears of career repercussions from the REF drive early career researchers to produce publishable work more quickly, leading to a quantity over quality dynamic in which research articles and book chapters replace monographs and editions. I am aware that monographs and, in particular, editions are not key measures of research outside of the arts and humanities. Nevertheless, as monographs are central to a number of disciplines such as English, History and Medieval Studies, the movement away from their production highlights the sidelining of long-form research in the restricted timescale of the REF. In Medieval Studies, writing research articles will not only displace monographs, but can mean that scholars move away from the production of editions of medieval texts. The time, money and demands of undertaking original research in manuscript libraries is difficult to reconcile with the restricted timetable of the four-year REF cycle. This point is one which is echoed by Richard Bowring in his advice to early career researchers: ‘Forget the book that may take ten years to produce but will last a lifetime; forget the dictionary that might take 20 years but last a hundred’ (Bowring 2010). The REF produces an academic climate in which frightened early career scholars avoid taking risks, put pressure on ourselves to make our research conform to

the circumscribed criteria of respected journals, and constantly second-guess what others might want from our work.

The impact of the current academic climate on feminist medieval studies

The drive to publish particularly impacts feminist scholarship by privileging less radical work in the academy and this trend is pronounced in Medieval Studies. There are three main ways that current academic structures impact literary and historical research on the middle ages. Firstly, there is the need to prove academic credentials by referencing authors who do not mention gender, or are opposed to feminist study leading to a pattern of negative citations. Secondly, editions of medieval texts are often outdated and often reinscribe misogynist gender norms from earlier historical periods. Thirdly, as early generations of female medievalists are not given credit in the historiography of Medieval Studies, young medievalists are less likely to publish feminist work because they cannot place themselves within a scholarly tradition.

If one is to give an accurate picture of the state of research in the field of Medieval Studies, then giving a disproportionate amount of time to authors of criticism who do not recognise the value of gender studies is unavoidable. Despite Medieval Studies being one of the pioneering fields in feminist research since the nineteenth century, the majority of critical work I use rarely mentions gender or is hostile to feminist concerns. What follows are a few examples of the problems that this can cause.

Mary Dockray Miller (2008, p. 1057) argues that the 'landscape of Anglo-Saxon literary culture [...] is no longer an almost exclusively masculine preserve', calling this a 'paradigm shift' in Anglo-Saxon studies. Much as I would like to share her optimism, feminist approaches to Anglo-Saxon texts are still seen by many as an

'add-on' rather than an essential part of the discipline. In Hugh Magennis' recent overview in *The Cambridge Introduction to Anglo-Saxon Literature* (2011), he includes a section on critical and theoretical approaches to the field entitled 'Studying Anglo-Saxon Literature: perspectives and perceptions'. This section summarises different ways of approaching Anglo-Saxon literary texts, beginning with historicism and philology and moving to the importance of formulaic studies and formalism post World War Two. He then finishes the section with a summary of the state of Anglo-Saxon Studies today, stating that modern critics are interested in 'the contradictions, tensions and instabilities that can be discerned in texts', 'the manuscript context of particular texts, which tended not to receive due attention in the past', 'such prose writing as homilies and saints' lives, which had been relatively neglected by previous scholarship', and finally the continuation of Old English culture 'down to the thirteenth century' (p. 14). This summary of critical work spanning the last century and a half of Anglo-Saxon studies, and description of the field today, completely ignores the body of theoretical work produced since the 1970s on women, gender and sexuality. In Anglo-Saxon Studies, then, it is still possible to pretend that women's and gender studies do not exist.

In fact, it is still almost possible to pretend that women do not exist. In John Blair's recent book *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (2005), there are only eight references to nuns, and eleven references to abbesses. Monks - as a solo category - do not appear in the index not because they are not referenced, but rather because the whole book concerns them. Blair states that his themes are 'the local and the ordinary' and he is attempting to 'frame [his] account around the generality of places which were typical rather than the few which are constantly discussed'. Typical and ordinary here both mean male. Nuns and nunneries are peripheral, called upon only when they

directly impact on Blair's main thesis concerning Anglo-Saxon church organisation. Referencing this book, then, means painstakingly reintroducing women into the story told by Blair.

Even monographs that primarily concern women can be problematic. Barbara Yorke's *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses* (2003) is an important book about the royal connections of nunneries and the class politics involved in their organisation. However, in the introduction, she sets up an argument against feminist interpretations of early medieval sources, stating 'it has gradually become appreciated, in early medieval studies as elsewhere, that there is a danger that androcentric biases will merely be replaced by gynocentric ones' (p. 5). Although she then argues that the emphasis is now on the social construction of gender, rather than the biological difference between the sexes, she still sets up a 'straw feminist argument' to justify turning away from feminist readings of the early medieval past. She points out that there 'has also been some criticism of the tendency to assign a universal, timeless patriarchy to the early middle ages, and of feminist readings of texts, such as hagiographies, which do not take sufficiently into account the audience for which they were intended and the conventions and models that lay behind their composition' (p. 5). This holds up feminist analysis of texts to criticism, suggesting that they are shallow, historically blind, and focussed on finding their own biases in historical work. Yorke's book is useful in putting nunneries back into their place in the Anglo-Saxon church. However, it is hard to reference this text without coming up against its problematic assumptions about feminist historians, immediately putting feminist researchers in a defensive position.

The problems with these modern critical works are relatively minor, however, when compared to the problems found in editions of texts produced from the

nineteenth century to the 1950s. Many editions commonly used by modern scholars were produced in this period and there are no modern editions available. Recent editions of texts like *The Book of Margery Kempe* also smooth over the struggles their early female editors went through to get their work recognised. Editions such as these are important texts through which students are introduced to the medieval period, and their impact on generations of scholars is difficult to overstate. Christine Rose (2005, p. 38) summarises their importance clearly, pointing out that ‘what is at stake is...what lens we fashion through which our students see the Middle Ages’. Dockray Miller (2008, p. 1056) argues that our 'feminist analyses of Anglo-Saxon literary culture need to be folded into our undergraduate classes so that the twenty-first century audience of Old English texts realises that both women and men were textual agents throughout the period'. However, without new editions that are fit for purpose, this goal cannot be realised.

A striking example of the problems with a nineteenth-century edition of a text can be seen in Walter W. Skeat's edition of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* (1881). This is the only complete edition of these saints' lives, and the only edition with a facing page modern English translation of all of the texts. It is the standard edition to use and the only way most people can access these saints' lives, unless they go to the original manuscript. Apart from the obvious problems with using an antiquated translation, which can be difficult to read and use outdated vocabulary, there is another fundamental problem. Here is a quotation from the ‘Preliminary Notice’ in which Walter Skeat thanks two women, saying:

The modern English version of the Homilies, though revised by myself, is almost entirely the work of Miss Gunning, of Cambridge and Miss Wilkinson, formerly of Dorking, who with great perseverance have translated not only

most of the text as contained in this first part, but nearly all of the remaining Lives belonging to the same series. For their kind and valuable assistance I am very grateful, as it has enabled me to proceed with the work in the midst of many other engagements

Half of the work in this edition, then, has been done by Miss Gunning and Miss Wilkinson, whose translations of the Lives run alongside the transcription made by Skeat. The contribution by these women is never acknowledged in scholarship, as they are not cited on the title page. Every time this edition is cited, these women are silenced again, and the culture that meant they could not be awarded a degree at that time goes unremarked. Citation is an issue taken up by Bennett (2006, p. 23), who notes that even today women academics in Medieval Studies often do not cite other women, and so the tradition of women's scholarly production is lost.

Editions from the 1950s, to take another example, are sexist in less subtle ways. One example of this is the only edition of the Wooing Group, produced in 1958. The Wooing Group is a collection of anonymous medieval writings partly written in the voice of a woman. The editor, W. Meredith Thompson, asserts that 'it is unlikely that the *Wohunge* was written vicariously, or that it is chiefly an allegory; and that it is likely that it was written by a gifted woman' (p. xxiv). However, he cites no concrete evidence for this at all, instead claiming that 'the preponderance of enthusiasm and fantasy over thought...bespoke feminine (and spontaneous) composition' (p. xxiv). Once again, we find a dubious equation of masculinity with thought, and femininity with hysteria. These sorts of sexist generalisations are both funny and sad. The problem is not that they exist, as they provide a valuable insight into the ways in which women have been sidelined in the past. These editions are not museum pieces that can be looked at as a reminder of worse times that are behind us.

These editions are the *only* editions of these texts, and these are just a few examples that I have come across in my research. I, and others, are forced to reference these outdated, sexist works and, in so doing, afford them an academic legitimacy they do not deserve. They necessitate a disruption in the flow of my argument in order to refute the sexist assumptions of their editing style. Concomitantly, when students meet any of these texts, they are encountering them in a framework that tells them that women do not matter, that the contributions of women to research does not matter, and by extension, that the contributions of women to history itself does not matter.

More modern editions of works can also smooth over or edit out problems that the early female editors faced. For example, *The Book of Margery Kempe* was identified in 1934 by Hope Emily Allen. She then asked Stanley Meech to collaborate with her in the editing of the text for the Early English Text Society; she would provide the introduction, and notes on mysticism (her speciality) and he would edit the text. However, Meech began mistreating Allen, and attempted to take over the edition.¹ A letter from Allen at this time reads: ‘I have found that when Mr Meech was assigned the editing of the text it was assumed in some quarters that I had given up all collaboration...I am occasionally put in the hateful situation of giving the reminder "I am writing the Introduction, and the notes on Mysticism"' (Quoted in Hirsh 1988, p. 119). Eventually the work was issued in two volumes, as the collaborators could not agree. Hirsh (1988, p. 127) remarks ‘it is impossible to believe that he would have treated a senior male colleague as he treated her’. This history of the discovery and first edition of the *Book* is totally absent from Windeatt’s (2000) edition in translation; in fact he does not mention Allen and Meech’s edition at all. In Windeatt’s (2004) scholarly edition of the *Book*, he merely mentions: ‘the pioneering scholarship of

Hope Emily Allen and Sanford Brown Meech' (p. xvii). This smoothing over of the misogyny faced by Allen in her attempted collaboration with Meech does her a disservice, as the problems she faced are not recognised.

Even more modern editions can have textual problems, which come down to issues of editing style. Discussing Lewis Thorpe's edition of *Le Roman de Silence*, F. Regina Psaki (1997) states that modern editing practices can promote a perception of a misogynist Middle Ages more than the original texts themselves in fact support. In Thorpe's edition (1972, cited Psaki 1997), the insertion of the characters' speeches into quotation marks gives the central narrator an authoritative weight not found in the original manuscript where all of the voices follow on from each other unpunctuated. As the narrator of the tale is more profoundly misogynist than the tale itself, the privileging of his voice means that the text is made more hostile to women in the edition than it was in manuscript form.

In an academic field with sufficient funds (and where does that exist in the humanities these days?), the answer to this problem would be to commission a raft of new editions that do not reproduce the problems of their predecessors. Rose (2005) calls attention to the need for more rigorous archival training for medievalist graduate students to enable such new editions to be produced. Usefully, in the last twenty years steps have been taken to create new editions of texts concerning women. Notable student editions include Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's *Medieval English Prose for Women* (1992), a parallel text edition of three medieval texts written for women. There have also been explicitly women-focussed editions of Goscelin's *Liber confortatorius* (2004), Monica Green's *Trotula* compendium of women's medicine (2001) and selected source study books such as Carolyn Larrington's (1995) *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe* and Emilie Amt's (1993) *Women's Lives in*

Medieval Europe. The Library of Medieval Women series from Boydell and Brewer also provides good editions of work concerning women in Modern English translation. However, many of these editions were produced before the global recession in the 2008 and the subsequent knock-on climate of austerity in higher education really began. Moreover, they cannot be used for scholarly work in isolation as they only provide the texts in Modern English translation. As the production of new editions is a significant investment of research time and money, pressures on PhD students and early career researchers to publish quickly steer us away from embarking on such ambitious editing projects. What is more, the need to revisit original manuscript sources, probably in a variety of libraries in the UK and abroad, is a significant monetary investment that many early career researchers simply cannot afford and do not have access to funding to support.

What is more, all the good examples of women-focussed editions cited above are editions of late medieval texts. From a feminist perspective, the editing of Anglo-Saxon texts is lagging behind, as these texts have historically been studied for their contribution to the English language rather than as literary objects in their own right. All this means that there is still a long way to go in order to avoid the problematic assumptions about and towards gender found in these texts. Even if the academic climate were entirely favourable to the production of such editions, they take a long time to research and produce, therefore we cannot rely on their production to combat sexism in the academy in the short term.

Finally, the lack of recognition of a tradition of female academics in Medieval Studies means that young female academics can feel marginalised within their own discipline, so they will be less likely to publish feminist work. This silencing of the female and/or feminist scholar in the field of Medieval Studies has been recognised

by Jane Chance in her edited collection *Women Medievalists and the Academy* (2005), and also by a special issue of the *Medieval Feminist Forum*, entitled *Credit where Credit is Due*. This special issue provided a series of examples of the 'lack of credit' given to female medievalists in the last one hundred and fifty years. Felice Lifshitz (2009) notes that women medievalists were 'in on the ground floor of feminist scholarship' but due to their lack of funding and the fact that they did not train graduate students their work has not been recognised (p. 19). In the same edition, Rebecca Jefferson (2009) rehabilitated the contribution of two nineteenth-century women to medieval scholarship. Agnes Smith Lewis and Margaret Dunlop Gibson, twins born in 1843, visited St Catherine's monastery on Mount Sinai in 1892 and discovered some alternate texts of the gospels. Elizabeth Scala (2009) also notes that Eleanor Prescott Hammond's invention of the term the 'marriage group' for analysing Chaucer has been credited to George Lyman Kittredge for the past 92 years.

Women's work is always in danger of being written not only out of the history of the Middle Ages, but also out of the history of Medieval Studies. A lack of understanding of Medieval Studies as a discipline with a strong history of women writing leads us to assume that as feminist medievalists we are trespassing on a field not our own. Marginalisation comes not from lack of a past, but from the elision of that past. Attempting to redress this, *Women Medievalists and the Academy* (Chance, 2005, p. xxxv) thanks the 'academic grandmothers and great-grandmothers' to whom 'the women and men medievalists of today owe a debt of gratitude for having paved the way(s) to success and achievement.' Collections like these prove Judith Bennett (1992, p. 21) right when she states, 'Our history teaches us, then, that we, as feminist medievalists, are as much true medievalists as those who seek in Medieval Studies an arcane sort of truth and an elite escape from the modern world.' Ensuring that the

tradition of Medieval Studies that is by and about women is kept alive is one of the most fruitful things that we can do to promote new feminist work in the discipline.

Remembering women: An ethics of source study

In this last section, I propose some speculative solutions for the problems I have outlined in the previous section: that is, having to reference anti-feminist works, having to work from out-dated and anti-feminist editions, and the sense of lacking a feminist tradition within which to produce this work in the first place. The suggestions I make could be taken up by colleagues across other fields that engage in the study of written sources. I propose an ‘ethics of source study’ that builds on ethical concerns in the social sciences and applies them to the study of texts, thus allowing researchers to combat the problematic nature of editions and other work in our fields.

In academic fields such as sociology, oral history and anthropology, researchers are confronted face to face by their subjects - that is, the people from whom they gather their information. There is extensive literature on the ethical dilemmas that this causes, and reflection on how to counter these risks in order to carry out ethical research. Anthropologists in particular concentrate on whether or not to conceal their research aims from their subjects (Li 2008), how emotionally close to get to their subjects, and how much to help their subjects if they get into difficulties (Vanderstaay 2005; Tinney, 2008). Sociologists have similar anxieties about covert research (Calvey 2008), anonymity (Gibson et al 2013) and seeking informed consent (Sin, 2005). Oral historians are also concerned with the responsibility they have to their subjects’ stories (Hamilton 2008; Boschma et al 2003; Parry and Mauthner 2004). These ethical dilemmas stem from a desire to represent their subjects

accurately, and to ensure that no harm comes to them in the course of conducting their research. When dealing with living people's stories, there is a general acknowledgement among researchers of the ethical responsibility towards the research subject themselves. Ethical issues in the study of written sources, however, have not been addressed. When the people in our source material, and perhaps also the authors and editors of such source material, are no longer alive, do we have the same ethical responsibilities towards them? I argue that we do.

Feminist researchers have been particularly engaged with the question of the researcher's responsibility towards her subject. Majorie DeVault (1996) explains that one feminist methodology in sociology aims to do three main things: firstly, 'to reveal both the diversity of actual women's lives and the ideological mechanisms that have made so many of those lives invisible', secondly, to search 'for practices that will minimize harm to women and limit negative consequences', and thirdly, 'support research of value to women, leading to social change or action beneficial to women' (pp. 32-3). This methodology, I believe, can be used effectively to think through an ethics of source study for feminist medievalists. As feminists in Medieval Studies, we have a responsibility towards women in the past, even though we can only access them through source study.

A feminist ethics of source study in Medieval Studies can function within these three methodological guidelines and create benefits for our study of the past. Firstly, our sources must be read with the understanding that women's lives will often be absent from them, due to the ideological barriers of both the medieval period and the periods in which the sources were edited. It is important to acknowledge how women's scholarship has been erased from the history of Medieval Studies as a discipline, and how misogynist stereotypes still permeate the editions that we, as

feminist medievalists, must still use in our teaching. Secondly, and perhaps less intuitively, our research must minimise harm to women. By this I mean that we must avoid reinscribing problematic gender norms through our research, and pay particular attention to the intersections of different forms of oppression, such as race and class, in our subjects' lives. Thirdly, our research must lead to social change. This might be the most difficult of all. Medieval Studies is often seen as irrelevant to the modern world, however, I believe that by reintroducing women to history, or attempting to explain why they cannot be found in historical texts, there is a continuing relevancy for our discipline in ensuring that the historical basis for current misogyny is undermined. When we teach historical texts to our students, we can also influence their perspectives. Judith Bennett and Carolyn Dinshaw both argue - and I agree - that our study of this particular historical period can have valuable social effects. Bennett (2006) suggests that by showing how patriarchal continuities are present through time (such as the persistent undervaluing of women's work) feminist medieval historians can make a practical contribution to the struggle for the end to women's oppression. Dinshaw (1999, p. 142) argues that a commitment to queer history as 'affective relations across time recognises the historical past as a vibrant and heterogenous source of self-fashioning as well as community building.' In other words, knowing that you have a past can give you power in the present, and act as a resource for the building of community.

Advocating an ethical use of sources also means that we have an ethical responsibility towards the personages found in our source texts; we must not remember them as other than they were, if we can avoid it. Nancy Scheper-Hughes' (1995) distinction between observing and witnessing in anthropology is useful here. She argues that 'witnessing, the anthropologist as *companheira* ['female comrade'], is

in the active voice, and it positions the anthropologist inside human events as a responsive, reflexive, and morally committed being, one who will "take sides" and make judgments' (See also Hyatt and Lyon-Callo 2003, p. 134 for a discussion of the importance of taking sides in anthropology). In the feminist study of sources, we witness and we take sides. How we do so will differ from text to text: it may involve rehabilitating women who have worked on editions without proper recognition, it may call attention to the gaps in the source text where women should be and attempt to discover why they are absent. Watt (2013, p. 364) suggests it may include embracing 'the disrupted, discontinuous, fragmentary nature of the history that has come down to us', rather than attempting to fit women's literary history into a masculinist author-centred model. With regards to worrying editions produced by Skeat (1881) and Thompson (1958) and discussed in this article, it is important to be clear that we are using these out-dated editions of Anglo-Saxon and medieval works because we have no other choice. We must make sure to cite all people involved in the production of a work, and call attention to the women used as unpaid assistants on men's great projects. When using these editions to teach, we must call attention to the misogyny inherent in the way that the text has been edited and introduced, and make it clear to our students that we are only using this edition because there are no others available. The use of editions in translation from the Library of Medieval Women series alongside the out-dated original text edition could also be a welcome corrective while we await better editions.

I also see journal special issues like this one, and the conference that it was based on, as modelling a type of alternative academic network. Bringing researchers together from Education, English, Medieval Studies, Sociology and many more, this special edition works across disciplinary boundaries in order to recognise similar

problems faced by feminist study across the academy. Getting together to discuss how to resist enables us to use feminist tactics honed in one scholarly field in another, as I have tried to do in this article. Due to the systemic oppositions we face as feminist academics, working together and through one another's best practice can only aid us in our collective, wider aims. In the words of Sheila Delaney (2009), 'If there's a message here, it's: tell the truth and fight like hell.'

Notes

ⁱ For more information on the relationship between Hope Emily Allen and Sanford Brown Meech, see Hirsh's monograph, *Hope Emily Allen: Medieval Scholarship and Feminism*.

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